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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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HISTORICAL INDIAN BURIAL PIT NOW BEING EXPLORED

Huron Indian bones in large numbers were dug from a burial pit at a site not far west of Midland, Ontario, by workers from the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, last summer. This summer the excavations are being continued, and are of such scientific importance that the diggers will camp on the site itself. This ossuary wherein so many Indians were laid at the periodic Feast of the dead, is proving of exceptional importance in enriching Ontario history.

Discovered by Mr. Frank Ridley, of Islington, about three years ago, this Huron burial ground is believed to be the one described in great detail by Father Brebeuf (the martyr) in the Jesuit Relations of 1636, and which was sponsored by the Huron village of Ossossane, then existing nearby. Brebeuf saw this ossuary in actual use. It is hoped that the current excavations and research involved, will identify the site beyond doubt, one of the first of such Huron sites to be so authenticated.

Under the leadership of Mr. Kenneth E. Kidd, deputy-keeper of the Ethnological Collection at the Royal Ontario Museum, eight keen workers including high school and university students are carrying on the exploratory work. Says Mr. Kidd: "Much will be learned not only about Huron Indian burial customs, but also about Huron physique. Until now, very little has been known of the physical anthropology of these people. But the abundant human remains will provide a good body of material for the study of this aspect of their culture and condition."

There is an immense display of Indian remains, clay pipes, pottery fragments, beads and other relics from Museum-sponsored excavations in Ontario, always on view, at the Royal Ontario Museum.

SKUNK FEASTS ON TURTLES EGGS

Driving along the causeway at Long Point, Lake Erie, at dusk, a Toronto amateur naturalist stopped his car to watch a turtle twenty feet away in a sand pocket, solemnly attending to her egg-laying function. Directly behind her a handome skunk awaited the dinner gong with philosophic patience. That gong did not sound during the intrusion by human eyes, but, noting the pine-enclosed sand pocket carefully, the naturalist returned an hour later. Turtle and skunk alike had departed, and broken egg shells were the only relics to tell of the skunk's feast on strictly fresh eggs. On the same Long Point trip the observer found turtles especially numerous. Snapping turtles and spotted turtles were seen; painted, map and Blanding's turtles, and only the soft-shell species failed to join the parade on the sandy beaches. There is a fascinating display of the turtles of Ontario within the Royal Ontario Museum, and it was from a study of that exhibit that the observer mentioned found the identification of the species he saw much simplified. It is not unusual to find as many as 30 or 40 eggs in the rudimentary "nest" of a turtle.

SHREW'S AMAZING APPETITE

Sharing the same massive case at the Royal Ontario Museum are a magnificent Moose and a Pygmy Shrew. The shrew's share of the display is measured in interest rather than inches, for it is the smallest of the North Amercan mammals, while the bulk of the moose is familiar to all. But the diminutive shrews in their various divisions of the genus have appetites out of all proportion to their inch or so of bulk. Their body temperature of 100 (average) need constant feeding to maintain. At Camp Billie Bear where a Summer Nature School assembles each year, a captive shrew, though not a Pygmy, was fed squirrel meat in a test to see just how much food the tiny creature could dispose of in a fixed time. Of that delicacy it ate its own weight every three hours for three days.

PRECIOUS BOTTLE RESTORED

Glass but one sixty-fourth of an inch thick forms a precious bottle on view at the Royal Ontario Museum. Its body is the size of a grape-fruit, its neck, several inches long, is very slender. It is not only a fine example of 16th Century European glass, but has unique historical interest. Brought across the Atlantic presumably from France, carried in a canoe and over forest trails by the Jesuit missionaries of three hundred years ago, it eventually reached Fort Ste. Marie, near Midland, Ontario, not far from the scene of the martyrdom of Brebeuf and Lalemant. In 1941, archaeologists from the Museum unearthed the shattered bits of this bottle along with other relics. Expert workmen of the same institution undertook the restoration of the bottle from the fragments, and the seemingly impossible task has been well done.

DRAMATIC STORY OF PASSENGER PIGEON

An Ontario woman, Mrs. Osborne Mitchell, of Streetsville, has written the most complete and authentic story of the now extinct Passenger Pigeon ever published. Her book of nearly 200 pages is entitled The Passenger in Ontario, but its scope is continental, and tells of the birds in their millions that once darkened the skies of Ontario and other thousands of square miles in North America. What became of them all? Mrs. Mitchell tells of some fantastic theories once discussed—They were drowned in their millions in the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic Ocean, Lake Michigan. They had decided to take up residence in Australia; they had flown to the North Pole and were frozen to death! None of these weird notions, of course, had any foundation in fact. Mrs. Mitchell discusses the factors one by one—all scientifically sound—that brought about their extermination. Not a solitary live Passenger Pigeon now remains. But the finest collection of Museum specimens extant continues to attract thousands of visitors to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. This institution, incidentally, published Mrs. Mitchell's great contribution to the story of natural history in America.